

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Exploring Motivations and Perceptions of Small-scale Farmers: Considerations for Sustainable Agriculture in East Central Indiana

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This study employed qualitative research methods to explore the motivations, perceptions, and regional contextual factors that influence the management decisions of small-scale farmers in East Central Indiana (ECI). In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 key informants and 29 farmers were recorded, transcribed, and coded using content analysis to understand the factors most relevant to small-scale farming in the region. Several important themes and subthemes arose in the data related to farming motivations, barriers to farm sustainability, and farmer learning and education. The results of this study complement the findings of previous work that describe the complex framework farmers navigate when making decisions on the farm. Still, this study identifies subtle regional factors (i.e., market conditions, farming culture, local economy) that significantly impact farmers' decisions, and emphasizes the importance of local context in crafting agricultural policies and outreach efforts. Implications and recommendations for East Central Indiana are discussed.